

# Cohasset Mariner

The Mariner (and supplements) is a paid circulation newspaper published every Thursday at 541 Plain St., Marshfield, Mass. 02050 for and about the residents of Cohasset. Telephone 383-6321 or 837-3500. Mailing address: Box 71, Cohasset, Mass. 02025. Second class postage paid at Marshfield, Mass. 02050.

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As the Mariner goes to press Tuesday night, all news and advertising copy must be received by Monday at 5 p.m. Classified advertising must be received by Monday at noon. Readers are invited to submit personal items, accounts of social functions, meetings, weddings and engagements. Photographs (black and white glossy) are also welcome.

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## Editorial

### Highway Business

Town meeting voters should take a hard look at the Planning Board's proposal to dramatically increase the size of highway business lots on Route 3A.

And once voters have taken that hard look, they should reject the idea without equivocation.

The proposal — Article 71 in the town meeting warrant — would increase lot sizes in the highway business district from 10,000 to 40,000 square feet. It would also increase frontage requirements from 50 to 200 feet.

The article is defective in several respects and carries serious consequences for merchants doing business in the district — consequences that would have a ripple effect on all Cohasset.

The first public hearing on the article, held March 15, has been ruled illegal, since neighboring towns — Scituate, Hull and Hingham weren't notified. A second hearing has been scheduled for Friday night, on the eve of town meeting, which is what sea lawyers would call squeaking under the wire.

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A sweeping proposal such as this that must race the clock to receive even consideration at town meeting needs scrutiny. When scrutinizing, consider these objections.

The merchants in question — those who would be badly damaged by the change — are the largest tax-paying entity in Cohasset and the largest employers as well. Most would be threatened by the increase in lot size as they so eloquently indicated at the first public hearing, and one or two might be forced out of business.

Merchants in the highway business district are not a drain on Cohasset's public resources. To the contrary. In general for the taxes they pay, they receive fewer services than their brethren in the Village since Route 3A, being a state road, is maintained (and plowed) by the state.

By dramatically increasing the size of lots in the highway business district, Article 71 would serve to depreciate property that doesn't conform — being most of the district — thereby whacking a group of merchants who have spent years building up their businesses and contributing to Cohasset's coffers along the way. Changing the rules in the middle of the game, some would say.

Selectmen have unanimously voted to oppose the article, agreeing with Arthur Clark's assessment that it is far too restrictive. Aside from being far too unfair, we think.

The Planning Board has commissioned a consultant to make recommendations on the future zoning patterns of Route 3A. It is one of several such studies that have come along over the years. Unfortunately, this latest effort does not appear to have been used to its best advantage, if Article 71 is a product of it.

Restrictive, unfair and unnecessary. Article 71 from the Planning Board should be deep sixed as soon as possible.

## Letters

Letters to the editor on all subjects of local interest are welcome in the Mariner. Our policy requires that letters be signed with appropriate evidence of residency, but names will be withheld on request under certain circumstances.

## Voters Need More Time

By Gilbert Tower

Will the voters at town meeting be well enough informed on the Cohasset sewer problem to be able to make the best decision? If they are going to vote wisely they will have to apply their minds and do some hard thinking. The small attendance at the recent Advisory Committee hearing indicates that voters may not yet be taking much interest. Perhaps the meeting was not well advertised. Voters will have to decide the outlay of millions of dollars and considerable increase in everyone's taxes.

It would be a great help if we could plan the whole matter to its final conclusion and arrive at the final cost. Unfortunately, that is almost impossible to do. The program has to be carried out step by step. Each step is a problem. The right decision at each step depends upon what was decided for the preceding step. It will be difficult to see the whole thing through to its final conclusion. But rightly or wrongly, decisions have to be made based on the best thinking and information that can be put together now. Every year of delay greatly increases the cost.

This article for the paper will not attempt to recommend final conclusions. However, the writer feels there is a need for more information and more discussion. There are numerous angles to the whole subject.

A fundamental fact is that Cohasset's soil refuses to absorb the effluent from the septic tanks or cesspools of houses and business buildings. On the wall at the Bates Building there is a map produced by the U.S. Agriculture Department, Soil Conservation Division entitled "suitability of soil." To what extent that map is correct may be debatable, but the general conclusion is born out by the difficulties experienced with septic tanks of some homes on Lincoln Hillside and the Veteran's district. The Veteran's district is drained by a little brook called Peppermint Brook which terminates at Lily Pond where our drinking water comes from. Something needs to be done about that.

However, the majority of houses in the town have septic tanks that work successfully. Generally speaking, Cohasset's houses are well separated on house lots of generous area. So far as possible every house should dispose of its own domestic sewage. Presumably it will not be necessary to lay a sewer pipe in every street in town, but only in a few streets where it appears to be necessary. Some houses were built before it was realized that sewerage would be a problem, so that the town is now stuck with a few difficult cases.

One condition is that Cohasset is underlaid by ledge which does not absorb water so that ground water level is high and the soil will not perk.

On the one hand Cohasset is struggling with the problem

## Commentary

of sewage disposal and at the same time the town is continuing to grant permits for the construction of more homes. More homes mean more people and more people mean more domestic sewage. Perhaps the issuance of more building permits should be halted. That might please some people who would like to preserve the town just the way it is. On the other hand the writer believes that gradual town growth is beneficial. Our water supply is now ample for town growth, but we are confronted with the serious sewer problem. At the recent hearing before the Advisory Committee, Tom Hintz from Metcalf and Eddy handed out some sheets covered with cost figures entitled "Town of Cohasset, Massachusetts; Summary of Phase I Sewer Construction Costs — Financing and Impact on Tax Rate" (not dated, not signed). The tables of figures appear to be a good job of estimating costs based on planning to date. Supplementing the pages of figures, John W. Hobbs, Chairman of the Water and Sewer Commissioners spoke at length in a low voice about something which the writer missed altogether.

It is hoped that the Sewer and Water Commissioners will present a written report of their recommendations to the town. A report that people can read will be much more helpful to voters than discussion at town meeting which is often in a low voice and few people can understand.

At the recent hearing Advisory Committee members were handed a sketch by the Metcalf and Eddy representatives. The sketch showed the proposed location for the new treatment plant on the land which was bought by the town in anticipation of a new school house which is now seemed to be not needed. The location has been referred to incorrectly as the Music Circus location. Actually it is the former Tower pasture and Job Pratt pasture. It is between Smith Place and the Music Circus. The new treatment plant is shown at the north end of the town's land, close to where the railroad was.

The Music Circus location has the advantage of using land acreage owned by the town.

The present treatment plant on Jacobs Meadow does not smell. The writer stoutly challenges anyone who says it has noticeable odor. The writer recommends that the

new treatment plant be located along-side the present plant at Jacobs Meadow. Every voter should take a few minutes to visit the present facility. It is entirely open to view.

The difficulty in connection with the Music Circus site is that a pipe would have to be laid through the center of the town to carry the effluent to the ocean. The pipe will cross under Smith Place and under Pleasant Street, South Main Street, and Brook Street, and follow the brook through Jacob's Meadow under Cove Bridge and into the cove. Along that route there is already a length of 48 inch corrugated pipe from Smith Place to Pleasant Street into a six foot box culvert. That present culvert is for James Brook and the 4 foot corrugated pipe, part of it is insufficient to handle the flow of the brook after a heavy rain. The brook is obstructed so that Ripley Road is flooded to a depth of 3 feet. There is already a flooding problem, and a sewer pipe problem on top of that would amount to a big job.

That gets us back to consideration of Whale Meadow as the site for the new treatment plant. The town should understand that the unreasoning objections of a few property owners will cost the town a lot of money. The only smell would be the word "sewer." A treatment plant could be hidden by trees and would not be noticed.

To carry an outfall pipe to Sutton Rock sounds fantastic. If effluent were to be discharged into the cove it would be diluted twice a day by a large flow of ocean water in and out with the tide past Whitehead.

The cost of everything beyond the Music Circus would be in addition to the figures presented by the engineers. Metcalf and Eddy predict a two dollar increase in the tax rate and besides that there would be an \$800.00 or more cost per household served. The figures presented by Tom Hintz include an estimate of one million dollars for the design cost. That is a staggering figure, hard to understand.

The report of the engineers and the recommendations of the sewer commissioners have been so much delayed that little time is left for the voters at town meeting to do some thinking.

That raises the question as to whether it would be better to postpone a decision until a special town meeting in September. It seems obvious that voters will need more time to think about an alternative.

## No Ruling Yet

Town Counsel J. Blake Thaxter still had no ruling Tuesday afternoon concerning possible conflict of interest allegations levelled at two members of the Planning Board, Chairman Glenn Pratt and Vice-Chairman John Bradley, and

former member Roberta Leary, consultant to the board.

Thaxter said that he is waiting to hear of a decision from the District Attorney's office where the matter was deferred last week. A ruling is expected this week.